

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EMIN, BL, US

SUBJECT: LITHIUM DISCOVERY IN SALAR DE UYUNI

REF: A) LA PAZ 5070, B) LA PAZ 5060, C) STATE 152773

GEORGE E. ERICKSEN AND JAMES D. VINE, GEOLOGISTS, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, SUBJECT TO INTERNAL APPROVALS, AVAILABLE TO COOPERATE WITH GEOBOL IN MAKING PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF LITHIUM RESOURCES OF SALAR DE UYUNI IN SEPTEMBER, 1976. ERICKSEN IS FORMER USGS CHIEF OF THE BRANCH OF LATIN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN GEOLOGY AND A RECOGNIZED AUTHORITY ON ANDEAN SALARS. VINE IS CHIEF OF THE USGS LITHIUM RESOURCES GROUP, WHICH IS ACTIVELY EXPLORING FOR LITHIUM DEPOSITS IN THE UNITED STATES. THE PRELIMINARY STUDY SHOULD HAVE THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF DETERMINING THE AREAL DISTRIBUTION OF LITHIUM-RICH BRINES IN SALAR DE UYUNI AND IN OTHER SALARS IN THE BOLIVIAN ALTIPLANO. THE FIELD INVESTIGATION WOULD PROBABLY REQUIRE 3-4 WEEKS, AND WOULD SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR PLANNING LATER MORE INTENSIVE STUDY TO DETERMINE RESERVES, WHICH WILL REQUIRE A DRILLING PROGRAM. ADDITIONAL BRINE SAMPLES FROM UYUNI WOULD BE WELCOME, AND CAN BE READILY ANALYZED FOR LITHIUM AND

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POTASSIUM, THE TWO ELEMENTS OF GREATEST INTEREST. HOWEVER,

SUCH BRINE SAMPLES OF LIMITED USEFULNESS WITHOUT INFORMATION ABOUT GEOLOGY AND HYDROLOGY OF THE COLLECTION SITES. IF COLLECTED, THE SAMPLES SHOULD BE TAKEN FROM PITS IN AREAS OF THICKEST SALAR CRUST; 250 ML SAMPLES ARE SUFFICIENTLY LARGE FOR THESE ANALYSES.

ANALYSES OF THE TWO BRINE SAMPLES AT HAND WILL BE COMPLETED IN 2-3 WEEKS. CORRECTED FINAL VALUES FOR LITHIUM ARE 490 PPM AND 1510 PPM, RESPECTIVELY, SOMEWHAT LOWER THAN PROVISIONAL ANALYSES SUBMITTED EARLIER BY CABLE. PROVISIONAL ANALYSES ALSO INDICATE HIGH POTASSIUM.

GEOBOL SHOULD BE CONGRATULATED ON RESTRAINT IN PUBLICIZING FINDING OF LITHIUM IN SALAR DE UYUNI. AS NOTED IN EARLIER CABLE, THE TWO BRINE SAMPLES ARE AN INSUFFICIENT BASE FOR EVEN A PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE OF THE LITHIUM POTENTIAL. THE STUDY PROPOSED FOR SEPTEMBER WILL GIVE AN IDEA OF THE POTENTIAL BUT AN ESTIMATE OF RECOVERABLE LITHIUM-RICH BRINE CAN BE ONLY BE MADE AFTER A DRILLING PROGRAM.

USGS WILL CONTINUE TO PAY SALARY FOR THEIR SPECIALISTS AND WILL APPRECIATE GOB COVERING INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND INTERNAL EXPENSES. AS STATED REF A. USGS PREFERS, SUBJECT TO CONCURRENCE BY EMBASSY, THAT GOB PROVIDE LOCAL FUNDS TO EMBASSY FOR DISBURSEMENT FOR USGS SPECIALISTS AND PAYMENT FOR TICKETS, EXCLUDING TRANSPORTATION WITHIN BOLIVIA. IF AFFIRMATIVE, FUNDS RECEIVED SHOULD BE DEPOSITED INTO ACCOUNT 14FT800(900). AMOUNT TO BE ADVANCED BY GOB ESTIMATED AT (U.S.) 5,000 DOLLARS. KISSINGER

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